

Epic of Gilgamesh

INTRODUCTION

Considered one of the greatest works of Mesopotamia.

Themes: Death and friendship. Nature and civilization, travel, adventures, homecoming, love, and sexuality.

- Gilgamesh was thought to be a priest-king of the city-state Uruk in Southern Mesopotamia, the lands around the rivers Euphrates and Tigris in Modern Day Iraq. He probably ruled around 2,700 BCE. Experts are unsure how close in personality he was to the fictional version.

In the epic, he appears as 2/3 divine and 1/3 human. Gilgamesh is the offspring of Ninsun (a goddess in the shape of a wild cow), and a human father named Lugalbanda. By some accounts, Gilgamesh means “the offspring is a hero” or, according to another etymology, “the old man is still a young man.”

The earliest story of Gilgamesh appears around 2,100 BCE in a cycle of poems in the Sumerian language. The Sumerian poetry cycle became the basis for the old version of Gilgamesh, written in Babylonian, a variant of the Akkadian language- a transnational written language that was widely used throughout the Ancient Near East.

The word epic comes from the Greek term meaning simply “speech” or “song.”

Shamhat, the prostitute who brings Enkidu to the city, speaks with unexpected eloquence and distinction. Shamhat is a thought-provoking example of the several powerful female protagonists in Gilgamesh. Much of what Gilgamesh accomplishes is ultimately due to women:

- His mother’s pleas with the sun god Shamash allow him to kill Humbaba
- The wife of the scorpion monster persuades her husband to give Gilgamesh entrance to the tunnel leading to the jeweled garden
- The mysterious woman he finds at the end of the world (the tavern keeper Siduri) helps him find Utnapishtim
- Utnapishtim’s wife persuades her husband to give Gilgamesh the plant of rejuvenation

The Epic of Gilgamesh is the first recorded narrative/story in history (that we are aware of). The name Gilgamesh translates to "Father-Hero."

Possibly means "the ancestor is a hero", from Sumerian 𒂗 (bilga) meaning "ancestor" and 𒂗 (mes) meaning "hero, young man". This was the name of a Sumerian hero, later appearing in the Akkadian poem the 'Epic of Gilgamesh'. Gilgamesh, with his friend Enkidu, battled the giant Humbaba and stopped the rampage of the Bull of Heaven, besides other adventures. Gilgamesh was probably based on a real person: a king of Uruk who ruled around the 27th century BC.
(<https://www.behindthename.com/name/gilgamesh>)

10,000 BC: Agricultural Mesopotamia --> between the Tigris and Euphrates (They flow parallel, Northwest to Southeast)

3,000 BC: Sumer (Sumerians)

2,700 BC: Uruk (City)

2,000 BC: Babylon (Babylonians)

1,200 BC: Sin-leqi-Unninni = Priest who wrote down the story of Gilgamesh after years of it being passed down, orally. It was written down in cuneiform ("wedge shape").

1,000 BC: Assyrians/ Assyria --> City of Ninevah: Some time later, Ninevah was burned and ransacked. The tablets of Gilgamesh lay in the library ruins.

1853 AD: The 12 tablets of Gilgamesh were found during an archeological excavation, with no one to decipher them.

1872 AD: George Smith, a basic laborer who regularly polished the tablets of Gilgamesh. He managed to translate the tablets, something that none of the English scholars managed to do. The tablets, most notably, speak of the Great Flood (Noah). Their version of Noah is Utnapishtim.

Only 11 tablets of Gilgamesh are in the modern transcriptions of Gilgamesh. The 12th tablet is "out of place." It doesn't fit with the main narrative.

The Ancient Sumerians were polytheists.

- **Anu:** Sky god; King of the Gods
- **Aruru:** Goddess of Creation and Birth
- **Ishtar:** Goddess of Love
- **Ninsun:** Cow Goddess
- **Ninurta:** God of Agriculture

- **Shamash:** God of the sun and of oracles, overseeing matters of justice and right dealing.
- **Enlil:** Supreme God on Earth
- **Ea:** God of Wisdom and magick; known for his beneficence to humanity
- **Aya:** Goddess of the Dawn, wife of Shamash (sun god) was often called upon in prayers to intercede with her husband.
- **Irnina:** Another name for Ishtar and a local form of the goddess
- **Ninhishzida:** Literally, "Lord of the Uprights Tree," a netherworld deity.
- **Ereshkigal:** Queen of the Netherworld and jealous sister of Ishtar
- **Belet-Seri:** Literally, "Lady of the Steppe," scribe or book keeper in the Netherworld
- **Ninshuluhha:** A netherworld deity in charge of ritual washing
- **Ennugi:** Minor deity in charge of water courses
- **Atrahasis:** Literally "super-wise," another Akkadian name of the immortal flood hero Utnapishtim.
- **Adad:** God of Thunder
- **Shullat and Hanish:** Gods of Destructive Storms
- **Errakal:** God of Death
- **Ninurta:** God of War
- **Belet-ili:** Goddess of birth, who in one version of the flood story was said to have collaborated with the god Ea in creating the human race

Tablets I and II

Parents of Gilgamesh

- **Lugalbanda:** Father of Gilgamesh, earlier king of Uruk
- **Ninsun:** Cow goddess, called "The wild cow." Mother of Gilgamesh

Gilgamesh was king of the largest city-state of Uruk. The people were very proud to have him as their king and of his accomplishments. But he also brought his people great pain. He regularly forces young men to battle him to the death and "would leave no girl to her mother." Was a wedding crasher. Instigated the destruction of young men and victimization of young women.

The gods decided that Gilgamesh needed an equal, soon after hearing the prayers of his people. They choose Enkidu for this role. Not long after, a hunter sees Enkidu in the forest while he is trying to hunt. Enkidu is destroying all of his traps, making it impossible for him to hunt. The hunter is then sent by his father to ask Gilgamesh how to stop Enkidu. Gilgamesh sends the temple prostitute with him to aid him in this task.

It takes three days for Shamhat and the hunter to return to his home (the steppes) from Uruk. They wait for two days by the watering hole for Enkidu to arrive. For six days and seven nights, Shamhat and Enkidu have sex.

During this time, Gilgamesh has dreams that portend the coming of Enkidu into his life. He goes to his mother, Ninsun, for advice.

Lines 248-250 (Gilgamesh to Ninsun)

[I fell in love with it], like a woman I caressed it,
I carried it off and laid it down before you,
Then you were making it my partner.

Lines 260-265 (Ninsun to Gilgamesh)

Your falling in love with it, your caressing it like a woman,
Means there will come to you a strong one,
A companion who rescues a friend.
He will be mighty in the land, strength will be his,
Like the force of heaven, so mighty will be his strength.
You will fall in love with him and caress him like a woman.
He will be mighty and rescue you, time and again.

- Sounds pretty gay to me, which I like.
So, unless there's some cultural context that I'm not getting [probably], it seems pretty gay.

Told to Enkidu by Shamash

Bread= staff of life

Beer= Custom of the Land

This is Enkidu's first cooked meal, eaten with Shamash and local shepherds.

Lines 70-73 (Shepherd to Enkidu [About Gilgamesh])

He mates with the lawful wife,
He first, the groom after.
By divine decree pronounced,

From the cutting of his umbilical cord, she is his due.

- This means that by his birthright, Gilgamesh can take brides on their wedding nights (rape), and then leave them to their husbands.

This angers Enkidu, so when he enters the City of Uruk, he ends up meeting Gilgamesh at a wedding. He blocks the doorway, refusing to let him enter. This results in a fight, Gilgamesh winning against Enkidu. But the battle was so well fought that he comes to appreciate Enkidu. They immediately become friends and agree to leave together to the cedar forest to defeat the guardian of the great cedar forest, Humbaba.

Tablet III

Before leaving, the Elders of Uruk advise Gilgamesh to have Enkidu walk before him when entering the forest.

Lines 7-13 (Elders to Gilgamesh and Enkidu)

Let Enkidu walk before you,

He knows the way to the forest of cedars,

He has seen battle, been exposed to combat.

Enkidu will protect his friend, safeguard his companion,

Let him return, to be a grave husband.

We in our assembly entrust the King to you,

On your return, entrust the King again to us.

- “Grave Husband” plays on the words for “bride” and “internment” (grave); the phrase seems to portend Enkidu’s death.

The pair go to Ninsun (Gilgamesh’s mother), in her temple, seeking her advice. Gilgamesh is rather formal with her, showing her respect. Ninsun is distraught that her son is leaving for a dangerous quest and prays to Shamash (and in conjunction, his wife) for his safety. She also asks why Gilgamesh was endowed with “a restless heart.”

Lines 56-57 (Ninsun to Shamash and Aya)

May Aya, your bride, not fear to remind you,

“Entrust him to the watchmen of the night.”

Ninsun also prays for Shamash to send thirteen winds to help aid Gilgamesh in his defeat of Humbaba. Ninsun afterwards, inducts Enkidu into the staff of her temple and then adopts him as her own son.

Lines 88-90 (Ninsun to Enkidu)

Mighty Enkidu, though you are no issue of my womb,
Your little ones shall be among the devotees of Gilgamesh,
The priestesses, votaries, cult women of the temple.

Lines 92-95 (Ninsun)

As the priestesses take in a foundling,
And the daughters of the gods bring up an adopted child,
I herewith take Enkidu, as my adopted son,
May Gilgamesh treat him well.

Gilgamesh is then advised by his dignitaries and Elders not to rely on strength alone, and to (once again) let Enkidu take the forefront. He is also advised to libate water to Shamash and to think of his father. He does so.

Tablet IV

Lines 4-5

A journey of a month and a half in three days.
They approached Mount Lebanon.

- This happens multiple times, as they are following the Lebanon mountain range. These ranges run along the Mediterranean coast of present day Lebanon.

Lines 8-10

Gilgamesh went up onto the mountain,
He poured out flour for an offering, saying
O mountain, bring me a propitious dream!

Enkidu makes a shelter for him to sleep in and have his dreams. He sleeps in a circle of flour while Enkidu stands guard.

When he wakes up, Enkidu explains his dream to him. They will be successful.

This repeats three more times (Lines 1-25 are repeated 3 times).

Dream 2 (This dream is actually described, unlike the first)

A mountain pinned him to the ground by his feet, glaring fiercely. A handsome man ("handsomest in the world") pulled him out from under the mountain, gave him water to drink, and eased his fears. He set his feet on the ground again. (Translation: The dream is favorable and portends victory.)

Dream 3

The heavens cried out, the earth was thundering. Daylight faded, darkness fell. Lightning flashed, fire shot up. Flames spewed death. Then, glow was dimmed, fire extinguished, burning coals turned to ashes. (Translation: We shall be victorious)

Dream 4

Gilgamesh dreams of Anzu. Anzu is a monstrous bird with the head of a lion. He appears in a mythological story, where he steals power from the god Enlil but is defeated in battle by Enlil's son Ninurta. Anzu attacks them with fiery breath. (Translation: Shamash was protecting you. There is a mention in the translation of a young man in the dream. It's not mentioned in Gilgamesh's explanation of the dream. This is probably an issue in the Sumerian to English translation.)

Dream 5

Gilgamesh was fighting a bull. Someone pulls him out from beneath the bull, strokes his cheeks and gives him water. (Translation: The wild bull is no enemy, but the god Shamash, the protector. "He will take our hands in need." The man that pulls him out is Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh's father. Enkidu explains that he and Gilgamesh should rely on one another, and that they will accomplish their quest.

- Something has happened to discourage Gilgamesh, perhaps an unfavorable oracle. Shamash comes to their aid with timely advice, just before they hear Humbaba's cry.

They are told not to let Humbaba enter the thicket. He has one of his seven fearsome glories on. It was believed that divine beings were surrounded by an awe-inspiring radiance. In the older versions of Gilgamesh, this radiance was considered removeable, like jewelry or clothing.

The pair go after Humbaba together, but only after Gilgamesh consoles Enkidu, calming his fears. The tablet ends with the two standing before the forest.

Tablet V

“Thirteen winds” blotted out Humbaba’s face.

Humbaba curses Enkidu and Gilgamesh. “May the pair of them never reach old age! May Gilgamesh and Enkidu come across no graver friend to bank on.”

This is one of the elaborate, sometimes obscure wordplays in Gilgamesh. In Humbaba’s curse, “cross” sounds like “friend”, and “bank” echoes “grave”, so that the giant’s words can mean either, “May they not cross water safely to the opposite bank” or “May they not find a friend to rely on.”

They ignore the curse and kill him, despite his protests. They leave on a raft made of cedar trees, and take Humbaba’s “glories” with them.

When they arrive back in Uruk, Ishtar attempts to gain a relationship with Gilgamesh. He refuses, recounting her past failed relationships.

- **Dumuzi:** Shepherd god. He was a youthful lover of Ishtar, who let him be taken to the Netherworld when she had to provide a substitute for herself.
- **Brightly colored roller bird:** she struck him down and broke his wing when she grew tired of him
- **Lion:** when she grew bored of him, she dug for him ambush pits (7x7)
- **Wild stallion:** Whip, goad, and lash, seven double leagues of galloping. She ordained that he muddy his water when he drinks. Perpetual weeping for his mother Silili.
- **Shepherd:** Turned him into a wolf
- **Ishullanu:** A gardener. According to Sumerian myth, Ishtar seduced this gardener who she then sought to kill. He is turned into a scarecrow.

The Bull of Heaven

Commanded by Ishtar to destroy Uruk and Gilgamesh. Blackmailed the other gods to gain this authority.

- When it reached Uruk: dried up the groves, reedbeds, and marshes; lowered the river by 7 cubits.
- At the bull’s snort, a pit opened up: 100 men of Uruk fell in
 - Second snort: 200 men fell in the crevice
 - Third snort: A new pit opens up and Enkidu falls in it. This results in a fight between Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the bull.

Tablet VI

Enkidu dreams of his own death. He curses the hunter that brought Shamhat to him, then curses Shamhat. The god Shamash reminds him of all of the good that Shamhat and Gilgamesh have brought his life. Enkidu then retracts his curse upon Shamhat, blessing her instead.

Enkidu becomes sick for twelve days and then dies.

I DIDN'T TAKE NOTES ON TABLET VII

Tablet VIII

Gilgamesh mourns Enkidu, commissioning a statue of Enkidu. This statue is made entirely of gold and jewels. He then sacrifices cattle and sheep to the rulers of the underworld.

Tablet IX

Gilgamesh roams the steppe in grief. He wears a lion skin, shedding away his kingly garments. He not only mourns his friend's death, but also his own mortality. He seeks out Utnapishtim, a man given immortality by the gods after surviving the Great Flood (his wife was also made immortal).

Utnapishtim: Akkadian name. He resembles the biblical Noah and his name literally means "He found life." And his name is "Ziusudra" in Sumerian and "Ullū" in Hittite.

On his journey, Gilgamesh runs into lions. He ends up going to sleep while avoiding them. He has a dream that causes him to rejoice being alive, the moment he wakes up. He then kills the lions.

Gilgamesh also runs into scorpion monsters who guard the gateway to the sun's passage through the mountains. These twin peaks are known as Mashum.

OKAY, LOOK. I HAVE THE OLD REVIEW SHEET, I DON'T CARE TO FINISH THESE NOTES. I'VE ALREADY TAKEN THE TEST AND IF I HAVE TO READ THIS AGAIN, I HAVE EVERYTHING I NEED TO AVOID HAVING TO FULLY RE READ THIS. I'M ON BREAK AND I DON'T CARE TO REDO THESE FUCKING NOTES. I HAVE ENOUGH FOR LATER, AND HONESTLY, I CAN GET ALL THIS DONE DURING THE TIME I'M SUPPOSED TO BE READING. I JUST NEED/WANT TO ENJOY MY BREAK AND SHIT. I HAVE BETTER SHIT TO DO THAN PUT OLD NOTES INTO A DIGITAL FORMAT JUST BECAUSE I'M GOING TO BE TYPING UP MY NOTES MORE OFTEN.

